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ABSTRACT

While research has shown that both black and white children can clearly discriminate (usually through the use of dolls or puppets) with respect to ethnic identification by the age of 3-4 years, findings regarding ethnic preference are more complex. Researcher W.C. Banks has implied that research designs that compare ethnic preferences across groups cannot lead to valid inferences. Alternatively, it is proposed here that such research can be useful if two commonly used measurement approaches, one based on a comparison of preference choices and the other on chance frequencies, are considered as evaluating two different phenomena. When 21 studies are analyzed, different results are obtained by the use of different statistical approaches, one comparing percentages of own group choices. Most notably, it can be seen that whites consistently make more favorable own group responses than do blacks. This finding raises questions about the validity of white "control" groups for research on ethnic preferences. (Author/GC)

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Note on Ethnic Identification and Preference

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Note on Ethnic Identification and Preference

Abstract

Studies comparing Black versus White preferences for black and white stimuli have yielded contradictory results because most of their studies fail to measure or control a host of variables which are confounding and potentially interacting; and because dubious logical assumptions have been tolerated in establishing statistical significance. Twenty-one studies on self-esteem are reviewed and re-analyzed which illustrate that different conclusions emerge when alternative operational definitions for ethnic preference are applied. It is noted that Whites make more favorable own-group preferences than do Blacks. This observation demonstrates the need for more research on the reasons for differences in "ethnocentric" preference, and raises serious question about the comparability of white "control" groups for research on ethnic preference even when both Black and White groups are matched on what appear to be key variables.

Note on Ethnic Identification and Preference

Since the early 1900s, a considerable amount of research effort has been devoted to the study of patterns of ethnic in group and out-group choice among Blacks and Whites. Over 200 of such studies, for example, have been recently identified and reviewed (Brand, Ruiz, & Padilla, 1974). This review indicates that the most commonly used experimental stimuli include dolls, puppets, or black and white photographs. Furthermore, the study of ethnic group choice has been broken into two major sub-categories; the study of ethnic identification ("Show me which doll/puppet/photograph looks most like you/your brother/your family.") and ethnic preference ("Show me which doll/puppet/photograph is the nicest - least nice, cleanest - dirtiest, best student - worst student, etc.").

One fairly consistent finding from this line of inquiry is that both Black and White children are able to make reliable discriminations with respect to ethnic identification by the age of 3-4 years. Findings are much more complex and contradictory, however, when it comes to ethnic preference. Most studies indicate that both Black and White subjects prefer white stimuli and attribute more negative traits to black stimuli (Brand et al, 1974). A few studies, however, indicate the opposite; namely, that Blacks prefer black stimuli (Gregor & MacPherson, 1966; Hraba & Grant, 1970; Kline, 1970.) This contradiction also appears in a few recent studies of ethnic group choice among other ethnicities.

Both high own-group choice (Lefly, 1975; Rice, Ruiz & Padilla, 1974) and low (Rosenthal, 1974; Werner & Evans, 1968) have been found in Chicano and Native American samples.

These contradictory findings have led to serious questions about the reliability and validity of work on ethnic preference (Banks, 1976; Brand et al, 1974). It has been noted that there exists an entire host of variables with the potential to confound the interpretation of obtained results, and that these variables are rarely identified, much less controlled. To improve research on ethnic preference, it has been recommended that future studies examine the impact of these potentially confounding variables: geographic region where the study is conducted; date of study; the status of subjects with respect to segregation/desegregation in residence, school, or work; the relative representation of each ethnicity in the sample and population studied; the sex and ethnicity of examiner; the type of experimental stimuli used; sex, skin color, socioeconomic status, and age of subjects; sex, skin color, and degree of attractiveness of experimental stimuli. Two related recommendations are that multiple measures of ethnic preference be used and that enthnicities other than just Blacks and Whites be tested.

A second line of criticism has recently been introduced by Banks (1976), and this is the problem we will focus on here. The Banks' criticism is essentially logical and statistical. He observes accurately that most ethnic preference studies make comparisons across ethnic groups without establishing whether the stated preferences deviate

significantly from chance. That is, the question "Are White preferences for white stimuli significantlygreater than Black preferences for black stimuli?" has been asked frequently; but the question "Are White preferences for white stimuli and Black preferences for black stimuli significantly above chance?" has not been asked. Banks argues that data indicating statistically significant differences in own-group preference across ethnicities (the first question) are essentially meaningless in the absence of data indicating that own-group preferences are occurring at a frequency greater than chance (the second question).

We concur with the logic underlying the line of reasoning presented by Banks, but disagree with the implication that research designs which compare ethnic preferences across ethnic groups cannot lead to valid inferences. As an alternative, we propose that the two measurement approaches discussed above -- one based on a comparison of preference choices and the other based on absolute chance frequencies -- may be thought of as measuring two different phenomena. The remainder of this note expands upon this statement as a means of introducing a series of recommendations designed to sharpen research on ethnic group choice.

Studies which compare the number of choices made by Black and White subjects for an equal number of black and white experimental stimuli (the usual paradigm) are based on an a priori assumption that $p = 0.5$ for choosing either experimental stimulus. The logic underlying this assumption is that the probability of choosing either stimulus is equivalent since the number of stimuli are equal -- half Black and half White. We argue that this assumption is warranted in some instances,

but not in this one. For example, the rationale seems warranted in those instances in which subjects reach blindly into containers filled with objects which are exactly alike on all key dimensions, except one -- half are black and half are white. We do not agree, however, that Black dolls, puppets, or photographs are exactly the same as their white counterparts "on all key dimensions" except skin color.

Among the variables likely to influence probability of selection, one of the most obvious is frequency of exposure. Black dolls and puppets have been extremely rare until very recent times, and even today there are probably fewer Black and White dolls and puppets relative to their representation in the population. This same argument pertains to frequency of exposure to photographs of Blacks, regardless of whether one considers magazines, billboards, movies, or television.

A second variable is socioeconomic status with its immediate effect on frequency of exposure, and its indirect influence on probability of selection. The mean income for Blacks is below the national average, from which one may infer Black children may own fewer toys such as dolls and puppets (Black or White), and their parents may subscribe to fewer magazines (which might contain Black and White photographs). Furthermore, it appears very likely that poorer children have much less experience in the experimental task. That is, they have fewer opportunities to choose a preferred doll, puppet, or photograph in their day-to-day lives. No one knows how such a difference between subjects influences probability of choice.

Third, there is a host of examiner variables which have a demonstrated, or a potential, effect upon subject behavior in research of this type (Brand et al, 1974). Specifically, reference is being made to sex, ethnicity, age, social status, general bearing, and other examiner variables.

Finally, there is a considerable number of variables which operate much more subtlely, and which are seldom considered, much less controlled, in ethnic choice research. These variables may influence choice directly, may interact with the variables identified above to influence choice, or may have no influence whatsoever upon choice. For example, no one knows: (a) if Black-White differences exist in the frequency of play with dolls and puppets, and (b) if these differences disappear when racial groups are matched for income level and accessability to toys. Likewise, no one knows whether there are ethnic, racial, cultural, or class differences in degree of identification with stimuli representing ethnic groups such as dolls, puppets, or photographs. Finally, there are variables which almost certainly interact within research designs and which subsequently influence stimulus choice. There are no research data available, for example, on the potentially interacting effect of skin color of subject, examiner, and stimulus object.

With this theoretical material as background, it now seems appropriate to examine the studies conducted with Black and White subjects which have been cited most frequently. Studies summarized on Table 1 include those originally reviewed by Banks (1976) plus several others which have systematically labeled and controlled variables with the

potential to confound results.

Insert Table 1 about here

Table 1 demonstrates that the two different statistical approaches--computing and comparing absolute percentages of white choices by Black and White subjects (columns 5 and 6) versus comparing percentages of own-group choices (column 7) - lead to different conclusions. That is, the two different operational definitions of ethnic preference yield different results and seem to be measuring different phenomena.

Closer examination of column 5 reveals that only 6 of 21 studies reviewed support the hypothesis of Black selection of white stimuli at a frequency significantly greater than chance (Asher & Allen, 1969; Banks & Rompf, 1973; Clark & Clark, 1939; Harris & Braun, 1971; Hraba & Grant, 1970; Radke, Sutherland & Rosenberg, 1950). Of these six studies which meet the criterion of statistical significance, four indicate preference for white stimuli (Asher & Allen, 1969; Clark & Clark, 1939; Harris & Braun, 1977; Radke, Sutherland & Rosenberg, 1950); one indicates own-group preference for both ethnicities (Hraba & Grant, 1970); and one reports preference for white stimuli by both Black and White subjects as well as rejection of black stimuli by Black subjects (Banks & Rompf, 1973).

Joint consideration of columns 5 and 6 reveals a marked and statistically significant tendency for both Black and White subjects to select black stimuli in responding to items with negative connotations such as "which doll looks bad" (Asher & Allen, 1969; Clark &

Clark, 1939, 1947; Greenwald & Oppenheim, 1967; Gregor & McPherson, 1966; Harris & Braun, 1971; Hraba & Grant, 1970) or "starts fights" (Koslin, Amarel, & Ames, 1970; Radke, Sutherland, & Rosenberg, 1950). Reference to the last column demonstrates that in eight of the 13 studies in which comparative analyses were performed, Blacks preferred white stimuli more than Whites preferred Black stimuli (Asher & Allen, 1969; Helgerson, 1943; Horowitz, 1939; Koslin, Amarel & Ames, 1970; Morland, 1963; Radke & Trager, 1950; Radke, Sutherland & Rosenberg, 1950; Stevenson and Stewart, 1958).

This analysis and review of 21 studies on ethnic preference indicates clearly that different conclusions emerge from the two different statistical operations. When comparisons are made of responses from Black and White subjects, a strong trend emerges showing preference for white stimuli. When the data are examined for the frequencies of own-group preferences, the results are less clear. While a preference for white stimuli tends to prevail, the examination of own-group preferences reveals a Black preference of black stimuli which is otherwise obscured. Part of the reason for this difference is that White subjects respond more consistently than Blacks in an "ethnocentric" manner. That is, Whites consistently make more own-group responses which are favorable than do Blacks. This is an intriguing observation in research of this type and raises serious question about the validity of White "control" groups for research on ethnic preference. This reservation deserves consideration even when Black and White groups are matched on key variables such as age, sex, grade, social class, or intelligence. It

seems too likely that vast differences in life experiences may make such comparisons inappropriate at this point in time.

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TABLE 1

An Examination of the Most Cited Studies Comparing Preference of Black and White Stimuli

Study	N, age, and ethnicity of subjects	Type of stimulus	Response Mode	White-choice frequencies by Blacks	White-choice frequencies by Whites	Results Compared Across Ethnicity
Asher & Allen (1969)	186 Blacks 155 Whites 3-8 years	Black and White puppets	Which puppet: is the nice puppet? would you like to play with? looks bad? is a nice color?	 76* 69* 24** 69*	 76* 75* 18** 74*	Significant χ^2 on both Black and White subjects preferring white and rejecting black puppet.
Banks & Rompf (1973)	34 Blacks 34 Whites 6-8 years	Rewards given to Black and White examiners	Examiner rewarded for: main trial tie trials game winner	 88.2* 58.3 16.7**	 94.4* 70.8 95.8*	
Butts (1963)	50 Blacks	Colored drawings of mouse, boy, apple, leaf	Color this little boy (girl) the color: that you are that you like the little boys (girls) to be	 28 52		
Clark & Clark (1939)	160 Blacks 3-4 years	Black and white dolls	Give me the doll that: is a nice doll you would like to play with looks bad is a nice color	 59* 67* 17** 60*		
Clark & Clark (1940)	30 light-skinned Blacks 66 medium-skinned Blacks 54 dark-skinned Blacks Preschool age	Selecting white- or black skinned boy along with lion, dog, clown and hen from a picture series	Selection of black-skinned boy by: Light-skinned subjects Medium-skinned subjects Dark-skinned subjects	 56.5 41.7 40.5		

Clark & Clark (1947)	253 Blacks	Black and white dolls	Give me the doll that:			
	3 years					
	(29)		is a nice doll	58		
	(30)		you would like to play with	55		
	(27)		looks bad	19**		
	(30)		is a nice color	58		
	4 years					
	(29)		is a nice doll	76*		
	(29)		you would like to play with	76*		
	(22)		looks bad	24		
	(29)		is a nice color	72*		
	5 years					
	(46)		is a nice doll	72*		
	(46)		you would like to play with	74*		
	(41)		looks bad	11**		
	(45)		is a nice color	78*		
Clark & Clark (Continued)	6 years					
	(71)		is a nice doll	53		
	(72)		you would like to play with	71*		
	(56)		looks bad	15**		
	(71)		is a nice color	51		
	7 years					
	(72)		is a nice doll	52		
	(75)		you would like to play with	60		
	(45)		looks bad	17		
	(72)		is a nice color	48		
Clark & Clark (1950)	160 Blacks	Crayons selected to complete coloring of child	Color the child the color: you like little boys (girls) to be	52		
	5-7 years					
Greenwald & Oppenheim (1967)	39 Blacks	Black, brown, and mulatto dolls	Give me the doll that:			
	36 Whites		is a good doll	50	69*	Each identified with own ethnic stimuli. More Blacks than White preferred mulatto dolls. Anglos preferred white dolls.
	3, 4, 5		want to play with best	56	61	
			is a bad doll	10**	3**	
			is a nice color	56	71*	

Table 1 — Continued

Study	N, age, and ethnicity of subjects	Type of stimulus	Response Mode	White-choice frequencies by Blacks	White-choice frequencies by Whites	Results Compared Across Ethnicity
Gregor & McPherson (1968)	83 Whites 92 Blacks 6-7 years	White and black dolls	Give me the doll that: is a nice doll you would like to play with looks bad is a nice color	 40 51 0** 38	 79* 95* 7** 54*	Both Blacks and Whites correctly identified and preferred dolls of own ethnicity.
Harris & Braun (1971)	60 Blacks 7-8 years	Black and white puppets	Give me the puppet that: is a nice puppet you would like to play with looks bad is a nice color	 46 30** 79** 18**		
Helgerson (1943)	24 White, high SES 10 Black, low SES 28 White, low SES 73 Black and White, low SES	8 black and white photos of children laughing and sober	With which one you would like to play	47.5 55.8	50.26 50.67 63.17	A "tendency" for all groups to pick white playmates.
Horowitz (1939)	17 Whites 7 Blacks 2-5 years	Black and white drawings	Which one is you?	42	75*	Both groups preferred white drawings
Hraba & Grant (1970)	89 Blacks 71 Whites 4-8 years	Black and white dolls	Give me the doll that: is a nice doll you would like to play with looks bad is a nice color	 47 30** 61** 31**	 70* 83* 64** 48**	Both groups preferred doll of own ethnicity.
Kline (1970)	15 Whites 15 Blacks 5-7 years	Black and white dolls	Which will be more successful?	17.2	41.4	High scores attributed to both dolls by each group.

Koslin, Amarel & Ames (1970)	60 Blacks 60 Whites 1st and 2nd graders from segregated schools	Integrated and segregated classroom scenes	Show me the room that: has the nicest children has the most friends is best to work in is best to be in has the most fights	59 24 71* 47 47	95* 79* 79* 95* 37	Anova revealed significant choice according to race, but set stronger own-group preference among Anglos.
	1st and 2nd graders from integrated schools		has the nicest children has the most friends is best to work in is best to be in has the most fights	53 51 43 54 60	90* 98* 77* 94* 21**	
Morland (1963)	126 Blacks 281 Whites 3-6 years	Photographs of Black and White children	Which child would you rather be?	65.9	67.6*	With χ^2, more own-group preferences among Anglos
Ogletree (1969)	74 Blacks 45 Whites 3rd-5th graders	Asked to color two human figures	Color like yourself	28**	75*	Each group preferred own ethnicity.
Radke & Trager (1950)	90 Black 152 White Kindergarteners 1st graders 2nd graders	Black and white dolls	Choose the "one liked best" 	 61 59 51	 93* 84* 90*	 Higher own-group preference by Whites
Radke, Sutherland & Rosenberg (1950)	475 Blacks 48 White 7-13 years	Photographs standardized for representation of Black and White ethnicities	Pick one that: is nice does not tell lies is neat and clean starts a fight	 71* 61* 64* 32**	 74* 74* 90* 28**	 More positive attributes assigned to Whites by subjects of both ethnicities.
Stevenson & Stewart (1958)	195 Blacks 125 Whites 3-7 years	Black and white dolls	Choice of a playmate by: 3 year subjects 4 year subjects 5 year subjects 6 year subjects 7 year subjects	 50 61 65 67 35	 52 60 64 82* 82*	 More negative roles assigned to Blacks by subjects of both ethnicities.

* Denotes significant (.05) preferential choice in favor of the White stimulus.

**Denotes significant (.05) preferential choice in favor of the Black stimulus.